

Narrow Gender Gap in Upper Midwest

Joanne Miller
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science

Lawrence R. Jacobs
McKnight Land Grant Professor
Director, 2004 Elections Project
Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs

Sally Kenney
Professor
Director, Center on Women and Public Policy
Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs

Much has been made during the 2004 election campaign of the divide between the political parties, with most of the country designated “blue” or “red” states. Geography, however, is not the only cleavage. Gender also has been an important divide since 1980. President Clinton benefited from far more support among women than among men, leading Republican Robert Dole by 16 points among women in 1996. The gender gap dissipated after September 11, 2001.

The Humphrey Institute’s survey of likely voters in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa reveals relatively muted differences between men and women —often times within the margin of error.

Here are the most striking findings.

- Women are evenly divided between Kerry and Bush in Wisconsin and are only modestly more supportive of Kerry in Minnesota and Iowa.
- Although both sexes rank the economy and jobs as the most important problem facing the country, more men rank it as the most important problem than women. By contrast, women place more emphasis on health care and education.
- The gender gap is missing or remains historically modest regarding which candidate is best able to handle the national problems that most concern men and women.
- Although women tend to be more accepting of Kerry while men are more critical of Kerry, the sexes largely agree in their overall evaluations of critical personality traits.

The margin of error for results based on the entire sample is plus or minus 4 points. The margin of error is higher for analyses of gender differences given the smaller number of

cases. The Humphrey Institute Survey was conducted from June 21 to July 12, 2004 of 509 likely voters in Minnesota, 504 in Wisconsin, and 448 in Iowa.

Only modest gender gap favors Kerry

Although the Democratic presidential candidate usually enjoys a significant double-digit advantage among women voters, Kerry is about even with Bush among Wisconsin women and has only modest leads in Minnesota and Iowa. Among women voters, Kerry leads by 7.5 points in Minnesota and by 10 points in Iowa.

	Bush	Kerry	Nader	Badnerik	Don't Know/Other
Iowa					
Male	47.6%	46.0%	4.0%	0.8%	1.6%
Female	43.1%	53.5%	1.4%	0.7%	1.4%
Minnesota					
Male	47.2%	44.3%	5.2%	1.1%	2.2%
Female	42.3%	49.8%	2.8%	0.8%	4.4%
Wisconsin					
Male	48.0%	44.1%	3.9%	2.5%	0.4%
Female	46.5%	43.2%	5.0%	0.7%	0.3%

Differing policy agendas: Men speak with one voice; women are much more divided

In all three states, a plurality of both men and women rank the economy and jobs as the most important problem facing the country. Compared to men, though, more women rank health care or education as the top national priority in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Although women are about equally divided in their ranking of the most important problem facing the country, men overwhelmingly choose the economy and jobs as the most important national challenge.

Minnesota	Response	% Male	% Female
Most important problem	Economy and Jobs	29.8%	21.8%
	War In Iraq	18.4%	19.8%
	Health Care	8.5%	15.1%
	Campaign Against Terrorism	15.8%	9.1%
	Education	6.3%	12.7%
Wisconsin	Response	% Male	% Female
Most important problem	Economy and Jobs	34.5%	18.2%
	War In Iraq	19.9%	17.9%
	Health Care	8.9%	18.9%
	Campaign Against Terrorism	16.7%	12.6%
	Education	1.8%	7.6%
Iowa	Response	% Male	% Female
Most important problem	Economy and Jobs	34.1%	20.0%
	War In Iraq	19.0%	20.0%
	Health Care	7.9%	15.2%
	Campaign Against Terrorism	14.3%	10.3%
	Education	7.1%	6.9%

The keys to the gender gap

The gender gap is missing or remains historically modest regarding which candidate is best able to handle the national problems that most concern men and women. High profile issues usually drive the gender gap; but they are not working for Kerry in 2004 as they have for previous Democratic presidential candidates over the past several decades.

Modest gender gap on the economy. Among likely voters in all three states who point to the economy and jobs as the country's top problem, a majority of both sexes pick Kerry as best able to handle it. Women are only a bit more inclined to rate Kerry higher. (Because men are more likely to rank the economy as the most important problem, this issue offers Kerry his best opportunity to make gains with this group.)

Which Candidate is Better Able to Handle Economy and Jobs Among Likely Upper Midwest Voters Who Rank it as the Top National Problem

Handling Economy and Jobs	Bush	Kerry	Don't Know/Other
Male	38.2%	58.2%	3.6%
Female	26.6%	67.6%	5.8%

Iraq is a key to the gender gap. Men and women who identified Iraq as the nation's principal problem were equally prone to rate Kerry as better able to handle it.

Which Candidate Better Able to Handle Iraq Among Likely Upper Midwest Voters Who Rank it as the Top National Problem

Handling Iraq	Bush	Kerry	Don't Know/Other
Male	38.2%	55.0%	6.9%
Female	36.8%	53.4%	9.8%

But when they are asked whether they prefer to see U.S. troop levels increased, decreased, or kept the same, a significant gender gap did emerge. Women are significantly more supportive than men of troop reduction (64% versus 51%). Iraq and troop reduction appear to offer Kerry an opportunity to gain support among women.

Preferences Toward U.S. Troop Levels in Iraq Among Likely Upper Midwest Voters Who Rank it as the Top National Problem

	Increase Troops in Iraq	Decrease Troops in Iraq	Somewhere in Between	Don't Know/Other
Male	38.2%	51.1%	5.3%	5.3%
Female	27.3%	64.4%	6.1%	2.3%

Bush dominates terrorism: Among likely voters in all three states who ranked terrorism as the country's top problem, women agree with men in sizing up Bush as far better able to handle the threat than Kerry. Both sexes prefer Bush to Kerry on terrorism by a staggering 70 points.

Which Candidate Better Able to Handle Terrorism Among Likely Upper Midwest Voters Who Rank Terrorism as the Top National Problem

Handling Terrorism	Bush	Kerry	Don't Know/Other
Male	91.5%	8.5%	0%
Female	88.3%	10.4%	1.3%

Candidate personality: Despite areas of agreement, women are less impressed with Bush and more accepting of Kerry

Men and women in all three states converge in their basic evaluations of Bush and Kerry's main personality traits. Both agree that Kerry is more caring as well as more prone to "flip flop" and that Bush is more stubborn.

Despite these similarities, the sexes differ in some respects. Compared to women, men consider Kerry as far more inclined to flip flop. The sexes also disagree on leadership strength, with men perceiving Bush as notably stronger and women not consistently seeing a major difference.

Minnesota

Personality Traits	Response	% Male	% Female
Strong Leader	Bush	51.1%	44.7%
	Kerry	43.0%	47.8%
	Don't Know/Other	5.9%	7.5%
Cares	Bush	39.9%	36.2%
	Kerry	47.2%	51.6%
	Don't Know/Other	12.9%	12.2%
Flip Flops	Bush	30.6%	40.2%
	Kerry	53.9%	41.7%
	Don't Know/Other	15.5%	18.1%
Stubborn	Bush	72.3%	66.1%
	Kerry	12.9%	16.5%
	Don't Know/Other	14.8%	17.3%

Wisconsin

Personality Traits	Response	% Male	% Female
Strong Leader	Bush	58.7%	50.3%
	Kerry	34.2%	40.7%
	Don't Know/Other	7.1%	8.9%
Cares	Bush	40.0%	42.7%
	Kerry	48.6%	48.0%
	Don't Know/Other	11.4%	9.3%
Flip Flops	Bush	26.0%	35.4%
	Kerry	62.3%	51.0%
	Don't Know/Other	11.7%	13.6%
Stubborn	Bush	68.2%	65.9%
	Kerry	15.7%	15.6%
	Don't Know/Other	16.1%	18.5%

Iowa

Personality Traits	Response	% Male	% Female
Strong Leader	Bush	50.4%	46.2%
	Kerry	46.4%	51.0%
	Don't Know/Other	3.2%	2.8%
Cares	Bush	43.7%	38.2%
	Kerry	49.2%	56.9%
	Don't Know/Other	7.1%	4.9%
Flip Flops	Bush	28.8%	39.9%
	Kerry	56.0%	46.9%
	Don't Know/Other	15.2%	13.3%
Stubborn	Bush	75.2%	63.4%
	Kerry	11.2%	17.9%
	Don't Know/Other	13.6%	18.6%